

CRS Report for Congress

U.S. and Coalition Military Operations in Afghanistan: Issues for Congress

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U.S. and Coalition Military Operations in Afghanistan: Issues for Congress

Summary

The U.S. military has been involved in Afghanistan since the fall of 2001 when Operation Enduring Freedom toppled the Taliban regime and attacked the Al Qaeda terrorist network hosted by the Taliban. A significant U.S. military presence in the country could continue for many years as U.S., North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Coalition, and Afghan National Army (ANA) forces attempt to stabilize the country by defeating the insurgency, facilitating reconstruction, and combating Afghanistan's illegal drug trade. Despite NATO's assumption of command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the United States will remain the largest troop contributing nation and will continue Operation Enduring Freedom, intended to locate and destroy insurgents and terrorists operating in Afghanistan. Recent NATO combat operations have resulted in a request for an additional 2,000 to 2,500 NATO troops as well as a call for NATO nations to rescind national caveats on how their forces may be employed in Afghanistan. Insurgent activity continues to evolve, with some of the tactics and techniques being used by Afghan insurgents reportedly similar to those employed in Iraq. Reports suggest that instead of building a 70,000 soldier Afghan National Army as agreed to in the 2002 Bonn Conference, the Administration intends to support a 50,000 soldier force, while some Afghan officials suggest that a 150,000 man Afghan National Army will be needed to insure both internal and external security. Senior U.S. officials have also stated that the Afghan National Army needs to be significantly better equipped if it is to become an effective security force.

Despite the efforts of the Coalition and Afghan government, poppy production in 2006 significantly surpassed last year's crop and reported cooperation between drug lords and insurgents has added a new dimension and possible complications to efforts to combat the insurgents and the growing drug trade. The possible involvement of Afghan government and police officials in protecting drug traffickers, in concert with NATO's and the United States' indirect involvement in counternarcotics efforts, calls into question the Coalition's ability to stem the illegal opium trade that helps to finance insurgent operations.

The 110th Congress, in its oversight role, may choose to examine the impact of an evolving insurgency, the impact of NATO's operations against insurgents, the size, proficiency, and equipping of the Afghan National Army, and the effectiveness of counternarcotics operations. This report will be updated as events warrant.

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U.S. and Coalition Military Operations in Afghanistan: Issues for Congress

The U.S. military has been involved in Afghanistan since the fall of 2001 when Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) toppled the Taliban regime and attacked the Al Qaeda terrorist network hosted by the Taliban. A significant U.S. military presence in the country could continue for a number of years as U.S., North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Coalition, and Afghan National Army (ANA) forces attempt to stabilize the country by defeating the insurgency, facilitating reconstruction, and combating Afghanistan's illegal drug trade.

Current U.S. Forces

According to the Department of Defense (DOD), there are approximately 22,100 U.S. service members in Afghanistan.¹ The majority of U.S. combat forces composing the 7th OEF rotation to Afghanistan are from the Fort Drum, NY-based 10th Mountain Division, which constitutes the division's third year-long deployment to Afghanistan in five years.² About 5,800 troops from the division's 3rd Brigade, as well as Division Headquarters and other supporting units are from Fort Drum, while another 1,300 soldiers are from the division's 4th Brigade, stationed at Fort Polk, LA. There are also an unknown number of U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) personnel from all services that are part of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force that is conducting special operations missions in and around Afghanistan.³ The 10th Mountain Division is expected to be replaced in early 2007 by the division headquarters of the Fort Bragg, NC-based 82nd Airborne Division and one of the division's infantry brigades.

Aside from naval and air force special operations forces, U.S. Navy and Air Force service members are reportedly playing an increased role in ground operations in Afghanistan.⁴ Six of the twelve U.S.-led Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) are commanded by naval officers and 140 sailors are now serving on U.S. PRTs. According to a Navy spokesman, not including Naval Special Forces, a little more

¹ DOD Information Paper "Congressional Research Service Request for Boots on the Ground (BOG) Statistics for Iraq and Afghanistan," Nov. 3, 2006.

² William Kates, "10th Mountain Division Deploys," *Army Times*, Jan. 27, 2006.

³ CFC-A Fact Sheet "About CFC-A," dated Jan. 21, 2006, [<http://www.cfc-a.centcom.mil/Information/Coalition%20forces%20in%20Afghanistan.htm>], accessed December 8, 2006.

⁴ Information in this section is from Kate Wiltrout, "Navy's Role in Afghanistan Grows," *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, May 21, 2006.

than 500 sailors are presently serving in Afghanistan. The other six U.S. PRTs are led by Air Force officers and are made up of both soldiers and airmen.

No 2006 Drawdown of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan

There was no drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan in 2006 and current force levels will likely remain until at least February 2007.⁵ Senior U.S. military commanders in Afghanistan reportedly want to maintain the current troop levels due to increasing numbers of Taliban insurgents and the political and security “vacuum” that supposedly exists in southern Afghanistan. In addition to troops involved in combat operations, about 5,000 U.S. troops are involved in training and advising Afghan security forces and another 2,000 are involved in logistical operations and also providing manpower for 12 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs).

Coalition Forces in Afghanistan

Non-U.S. Coalition forces in Afghanistan are distributed between the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) — which conducts counterterror and counterinsurgency operations — and the NATO-led International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF), which now provides security for all of Afghanistan. Some countries contribute forces to both OEF and ISAF, while others contribute strictly to ISAF. At present, 21 nations contribute approximately 3,100 troops to OEF⁶ and 37 NATO and non-NATO nations contribute about 20,000 troops to ISAF.⁷

Transfer of Authority to NATO⁸

On October 5, 2006, authority for security of Afghanistan’s eastern provinces was transferred to NATO’s ISAF.⁹ With this transfer of authority, NATO becomes responsible for security assistance for all of Afghanistan. The current commander of Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan (CFC-A), U.S. Army Lieutenant General (LTG) Karl Eikenberry will transfer command of Regional Command-East (RC-E) to NATO/ISAF and approximately 12,000 U.S. service members already in Afghanistan will come under NATO/ISAF command. Ten U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) will transfer to NATO/ISAF. With this transfer of

⁵ Information in this section is taken from Ann Scott Tyson, “Taliban’s Gains Forestall U.S. Troop Reductions in Afghanistan,” *Washington Post*, September 22, 2006 and “‘06 Cuts in Iraq Troops Unlikely,” *Washington Post*, September 20, 2006 and Mark Sappenfield, “U.S. Troops Abroad: A Security Linchpin?,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 15, 2006.

⁶ CFC-A Fact Sheet “About CFC-A,” dated Jan. 21, 2006, [<http://www.cfc-a.centcom.mil/Information/Coalition%20forces%20in%20Afghanistan.htm>], accessed December 8, 2006.

⁷ NATO International Security Assistance Force Fact Sheet, September 16, 2006.

⁸ For detailed information on NATO’s role in Afghanistan see CRS Report RL33627, *NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance*, by Paul Gallis.

⁹ Information in this section is taken from an American Forces Information Services Fact Sheet, “Transition to NATO International Security Assistance Force,” October 4, 2006.

authority, NATO ISAF will have approximately 33,000 troops under the command of British LTG David Richards.

The United States will continue Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) with about 8,000 U.S. troops as well as troops from other nations. Troops under OEF will have separate Rules of Engagement¹⁰ (ROE) from ISAF forces, which will permit OEF forces to conduct combat operations. When CFC-A headquarters inactivates, the Combined Joint Task Force-76 commander, U.S. Army Major General (MG) Benjamin Freakley — also commander of the 10th Mountain Division — will become commander of the United States Command Element for the Afghanistan Combined Joint Operations Area (CJOA) and will also be commander of NATO's Region Command-East. MG Freakley will be not only the U.S. operational commander, but also the NATO/ISAF deputy commander for security. In early 2007, NATO/ISAF's current commander, British LTG David Richards, will be replaced by U.S. Army General (GEN) Dan McNeill.

Military Operations

Operation Mountain Thrust On June 15, 2006, more than 11,000 Coalition troops launched the largest offensive against the Taliban since the fall of the Taliban in 2001.¹¹ U.S., British, Canadian, and Afghan troops focused operations against southern Uruzgan and northern Helmand provinces. In addition to the destruction of Taliban insurgents, the operation was intended to establish conditions where Afghan “government forces, government institutions, and humanitarian organizations can begin to operate in these provinces.”¹² Prior to Operation Mountain Thrust, these provinces had seen little military presence and the Afghan government hopes to establish a permanent Afghan military presence in the region.

During the months of June and July, there was heavy fighting reported between Coalition and Taliban forces, with the Taliban exhibiting a high degree of coordination in their combat operations. Despite reportedly killing over 1,000 Taliban insurgents and capturing almost 400 more, the Taliban continued to exert a presence in these contested regions and in early August, the Taliban mounted a number ambushes and bomb attacks against Coalition forces. Twenty four U.S. service members were reportedly killed during the operation.

¹⁰ According to Joint Publication 1-02 “DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms,” August 2006, Rules of Engagement (ROE) are the primary tool used to regulate the use of force, and thereby serve as one of the cornerstones of the operational law and discipline. They are directives issued by competent military authority to delineate the circumstances and limitations under which its own naval, ground, and air forces will initiate and/or continue combat engagement with other forces encountered. They are the means by which the National Command Authority and operational commanders regulate the use of armed force in the context of applicable political and military policy and domestic and international law.

¹¹ Jason Straziuso, “Mountain Thrust Targets Taliban,” *ArmyTimes.com*, June 14, 2006.

¹² Ibid.

NATO's Operation Medusa Operation Medusa, a Canadian-led offensive in Kandahar Province from September 2 through September 17, 2006, involved about 2,000 ISAF and Afghan National Army troops.¹³ In addition to Canadian and Afghan forces, British, Danish, Dutch, and U.S. troops were involved in combat operations. Reports maintain that about 500 insurgents were killed during the operation and twelve Canadian soldiers were killed — one of whom was killed when U.S. warplanes mistakenly strafed Canadian troops — and 14 British service members were killed when their Nimrod reconnaissance aircraft crashed. One U.S. soldier was also killed during the operation. While NATO officials contend that Operation Medusa achieved its goal of furthering government control over rural areas of Kandahar Province and setting the conditions to begin the reconstruction of roadways and infrastructure, reports suggest that by late October, large numbers of Taliban insurgents had returned to Kandahar Province and significant clashes between NATO and the Taliban continue.¹⁴

Operation Mountain Fury¹⁵ As a follow-up to Operation Medusa, approximately 4,000 Afghan and 3,000 U.S. troops initiated Operation Mountain Fury on September 16, 2006, to defeat Taliban resistance in Paktika, Khost, Ghazni, Paktya, and Logar provinces in east-central Afghanistan. This is an ongoing operation.

NATO Calls for Additional Troops With NATO troops “being attacked up to a dozen times a day with an intensity and ferocity of fighting in excess to that in Iraq,” NATO’s Supreme Commander, U.S. Marine Corps General James Jones, has called for an in-theater reserve force to support ISAF operations.¹⁶ NATO reportedly would like to add an additional 2,000 to 2,500 troops, as well as a squadron of attack helicopters and two or three C-130 transport aircraft to support its operations in Southern Afghanistan.¹⁷ NATO hopes to use these additional forces and assets as a theater reserve so if NATO forces encounter significant enemy forces, they can call on the theater reserve as opposed to the current practice of taking troops from another

¹³ Information in this section is from “NATO/Afghanistan: Operation Medusa to Corner Taliban,” Atlantic News, No. 3803, September 12, 2006 and “NATO/Afghanistan: Medusa Operation Ends,” Atlantic News, No. 3805, September 19, 2006.

¹⁴ Abdul Waheed Wafa, “48 Taliban Die in New Wave of Fighting, NATO Says,” *New York Times*, Oct. 26, 2006.

¹⁵ Information in this section is taken from a Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan Press Release, “Afghan, Coalition Forces Launch Operation Mountain Fury,” Sept. 16, 2006; Fisnik Abrashi, “Allies Launch New Offensive,” *Washington Times*, Sept. 16, 2006; and Fisnik Abrashi, “S. Afghanistan Offensive a Success Story,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sept. 18, 2006.

¹⁶ Andrew White, “NATO Calls for Reserve Force in Afghanistan,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, Sept. 13, 2006, p. 4.

¹⁷ “NATO/Afghanistan: Alliance Seeks Additional Troops,” Atlantic News, No. 3803, Sept. 12, 2006 and John Ward Anderson, “NATO General Wants More Troops in Afghan South,” *Washington Post*, Sept. 8, 2006.

sector, thereby creating a security void in the losing sector.¹⁸ British LTG David Richards, the ISAF Commander, reportedly stated that NATO has insufficient troops in Afghanistan to secure a victory over the Taliban in the next six months.¹⁹ LTG Richards maintained that even though he did not have all the forces that he required, that the present force can “make sufficient improvements to keep the people here confident in us and in their government.”²⁰

Canada, France, Turkey, Italy, and Finland reportedly declined to contribute additional troops for this force but Romania offered to provide up to 200 additional troops and Croatia and Bulgaria offered to send just under 200 troops in early 2007.²¹ One report suggests that the French government is contemplating the withdrawal of a 200 man special forces unit that has played an active role in combating insurgents, noting that six French special forces soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan since 2003.²² Italy reportedly plans to withdraw as many as 400 soldiers from its 1,400 soldier contingent.²³ On September 14, the Polish government offered 1,000 troops for the force, but these troops, if approved by the Polish Parliament, were not expected to arrive before February 2007.²⁴ In order to meet this demand for additional troops, NATO officials reportedly explored the possibility of transferring forces from other parts of Afghanistan such as German forces stationed in the north or Spanish forces from the west but “national caveats” placed on how a country’s military forces may be employed limits the utility of some nation’s forces in conducting combat operations. Many European countries also contend that their forces are stretched thin with current deployments in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Ivory Coast, Congo, and the Balkans.²⁵ Spain, France, and Italy — who already have contingents in Afghanistan — have recently committed troops to the expanded U.N. peacekeeping force in Lebanon and Germany has ruled out sending additional troops to Afghanistan, noting that it’s current deployment of 2,900 troops is close to the 3,000 troop limit established by the German Parliament.²⁶

Impact of National Caveats. Many NATO nations have placed “caveats” on their forces deployed to Afghanistan. These caveats include geographical restrictions on where units can be deployed as well as what types of missions units

¹⁸ Andrew White.

¹⁹ “NATO General Cites Troop Shortfalls,” *Washington Times*, Nov. 2, 2006.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ “NATO/Afghanistan: Alliance Seeks Additional Troops,” *Atlantic News*, No. 3803, Sept. 12, 2006

²² J.A.C. Lewis and John Berg, “France Ponders Withdrawal of Special Forces,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, Oct. 25, 2006.

²³ “Italy to Withdraw 400 Soldiers,” *New York Times*, June 28, 2006.

²⁴ “NATO/Afghanistan: Poland Offers 1,000 Soldiers,” *Atlantic News*, No. 3805, Sept. 19, 2006.

²⁵ Nicholas Kralev, “NATO Allies Ignore Call for Troops,” *Washington Times*, Sept. 14, 2006.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

are allowed to participate in. In general terms, these caveats are intended to preclude the affected units from participating in offensive combat operations or other operations that carry a high risk of casualties. NATO's Supreme Commander, U.S. Marine Corps General James Jones, has reportedly asked NATO member nations to drop their restrictions on how their troops can be used in Afghanistan, suggesting that the existence of national caveats "significantly limits the scope of military operations there."²⁷ Reportedly, there are 102 restrictions that have been placed on forces by their nations and 50 of these restrictions are considered to be "operationally significant" by General Jones. Examples of these restrictions include limiting Turkish troops to the vicinity of Kabul and German troops only being permitted to operate in northern Afghanistan.²⁸ At NATO's Riga Summit in November 2006, progress was made on modifying some of these national caveats but some maintain that these modifications do little to ease the burden on U.S., British, Canadian, and Dutch forces.²⁹

Pakistani Military Operations Pakistani military operations in its Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) as well as along the Pakistan-Afghan border, continue to play a significant role in combating the insurgency in Afghanistan. While many U.S. officials praise Pakistan's military activities, some U.S. and Afghan officials question if Pakistan is doing enough in combating Taliban insurgents. Reports also continue to suggest that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency is actively conducting training camps for insurgents and supporting jihadist madrassahs (religious schools) along the Afghan-Pakistan border.³⁰

On June 27, the Pakistani Foreign Minister reportedly announced that Pakistan would increase the strength of its army in the FATA by 10,000 troops, bringing the total to 90,000 soldiers deployed in the region.³¹ The Pakistani Foreign Minister noted that as of June 2006, the Pakistani Army had lost 650 soldiers in operations in the FATA.³² On October 30, Pakistani helicopter gunships reportedly attacked a madrassa in Bajaur in the FATA which Pakistani officials allege was being used as a militant training camp.³³ The raid killed about 80 persons, including a prominent Pro-Taliban cleric. While the Pakistani government claims that those killed were insurgents, others claim that they were students. Reports suggest that this raid may have been planned by the U.S. military and that the attack will likely harden local resistance to ongoing attempts by the Pakistani government to forge a peace

²⁷ Information in this section is taken from Leo Shane III, "NATO Commander Asks Member Nations to Drop Troop Limits," *Mideast Stars and Stripes*, Oct. 25, 2006.

²⁸ Kraleov.

²⁹ "NATO Boosts Efforts in Afghanistan," NATO Update, Nov. 30, 2006.

³⁰ "Pakistan's Dangerous Afghanistan Policy," Jane's Intelligence Digest, Nov. 3, 2006.

³¹ Robert Karniol, "Pakistan Strengthens Forces on Afghan Border," Jane's Defence Weekly, July 5, 2006, p. 17.

³² Ibid.

³³ "Pakistan Madrassa Raid Kills 80," BBC News, Oct. 30, 2006.

agreement with tribes in the FATA.³⁴ Other reports suggest that Al Qaeda deputy Ayman al-Zawahri, believed to be behind the recent plot to blow up trans-Atlantic airliners, was a frequent visitor to the madrassa although he was not present when the school was attacked.³⁵

Evolving Insurgent Tactics

Insurgent tactics and operations against Coalition forces continue to evolve, and some maintain that they are becoming increasingly like the tactics employed in Iraq. One report maintains that Taliban insurgents in southern Afghanistan are training teams of snipers to target Coalition forces, a tactic that had not been previously used by the Taliban, but one that has been used to great effect in Iraq.³⁶ Allegedly, the Taliban has established a school for snipers at an undisclosed location in southern Afghanistan using instructors who had been trained as snipers during the Russian invasion as well as some Arab-trained snipers. In addition, the report suggests that the Taliban are also attempting to upgrade their Katyusha rocket launchers to the more modern versions that Hezbollah uses in Lebanon against Israel.

The use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Afghanistan also continues to evolve. In the past, Afghan IEDs tended to be buried anti-tank mines or artillery shells rigged with a pressure plate, but Coalition forces are reportedly encountering more and more remote-controlled IEDs.³⁷ These remote-controlled IEDs are largely radio-controlled, as Afghanistan does not have the extensive and well-developed cell phone network that Iraq has. More sophisticated IEDs are reportedly appearing in Afghanistan. Some of these IEDs supposedly have a special, key chain-like trigger imported from China that permits detonation of IEDs from almost one kilometer away. It was also reported that Al Qaeda insurgents from Uzbekistan are teaching the Taliban to manufacture sophisticated roadside bombs.

From an operational perspective, recent insurgent attacks against Coalition forces have been described as “larger-scale, more sophisticated, better prepared, and exhibiting greater degrees of command and control.”³⁸ Reports describe an attack in late March 2006 where about 200 insurgents attacked a group of U.S. and Canadian special forces soldiers and Afghan National Army forces at a newly-established base

³⁴ Aryn Baker, “Pakistan Braces for Backlash After Taliban Raid,” *Time*, Oct. 30, 2006.

³⁵ Associated Press, “Official: Al-Zawahri Frequented Attacked School,” *MSNBC.com*, Oct. 31, 2006.

³⁶ Information in this section is from Tom Coghlan, “Taliban Trains Snipers on British Forces,” *London Sunday Telegraph*, July 23, 2006.

³⁷ Information in this section is from Greg Grant, “Afghan Fighters Import Tactics Honed in Iraq,” *Defense News*, July 31, 2006.

³⁸ Greg Grant, “Afghan Fighters Import Tactics Honed in Iraq,” *Defense News*, July 31, 2006; Rachel Morajee, “Taliban Hinder NATO Ink-Spot Strategy,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Aug. 4, 2006; and Carlotta Gall, “Attacks in Afghanistan Grow More Frequent and Lethal,” *New York Times*, Sept. 26, 2006.

in Helmand Province.³⁹ The insurgent attack was characterized as “coordinated” - with insurgents attacking the base from three directions with small arms, mortars, and rocket-propelled grenades and was suspended only after U.S. aircraft arrived on the scene.⁴⁰ At the time, the Coalition viewed this as an isolated event but it proved to be the opening attack in a major Taliban offensive in southern Afghanistan that “caught the thinly spread American and NATO militaries unprepared and forced them into reacting to large-scale Taliban attacks.”⁴¹

Some suggest that these aggressive attacks by insurgents have helped to create a security void that insurgents are stepping in to fill.⁴² Because U.S. and Coalition forces have been extensively involved in combat operations, little has been done to repair destroyed Afghan infrastructure and discontent amongst Afghans has grown. Taliban insurgents have reportedly stepped in to fill this void, “setting up shadow administrations, offering people a chance to cultivate their drugs unmolested and promising a return to law and order they [Taliban] enforced before 2001.”⁴³ ISAF’s commanding general, British LTG David Richards, has reportedly stated that NATO forces have six months to reverse the Taliban insurgency or risk losing the support of the Afghan people.⁴⁴

Provincial Reconstruction Teams⁴⁵

PRTs are small, civil-military teams designed to extend the authority of the Afghan central government beyond Kabul and to facilitate aid and reconstruction projects. PRTs have enabled coalition forces to extend a degree of security to outlying regions and have also permitted U.S. forces to establish personal relationships with local Afghan leaders which some believe has helped to diminish insurgent influence in a number of regions. As of October 5, 2006, ISAF had 24 PRTs operational — 12 of which were U.S. teams.⁴⁶

Composition of U.S. PRTs U.S. PRTs consist of between 50 and 100 military and civilian personnel.⁴⁷ Civilian personnel usually consist of a U.S. State

³⁹ Grant.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Morajee.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Paul Wiseman, “Deadline to Break the Taliban: Six Months,” *USA Today*, Sept. 5, 2006.

⁴⁵ For detailed information on PRTs, to include specific information on each PRT, see CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.

⁴⁶ NATO Fact Sheet, “International Security Assistance Force: ISAF Regional Commands and PRT Locations,” Oct. 5, 2006.

⁴⁷ Information in this section is taken from a United States Joint Forces Command Report, “Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan - An Interagency Assessment,” Apr. 26, (continued...)

Department representative, a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) representative, and a representative from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). There is also usually an Afghan representative from the Ministry of the Interior on the PRT. In terms of military personnel, each PRT has a commander, two civil affairs teams with four members each, operational and administrative staff, and force protection elements — usually a platoon-sized (40 soldier) force.

The Afghan National Army (ANA)

Training of the ANA commenced shortly after U.S. and Coalition forces defeated Taliban forces in early 2002. The Bonn II Conference on rebuilding Afghanistan in December 2002 endorsed a 70,000 strong Afghan National Army.⁴⁸ Part of ISAF's mission is "supporting and helping to train the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to a standard that will enable them in time to assume full responsibility for the internal and external security of the country."⁴⁹

The ANA has been considered a relatively competent force, but one whose performance varies from very good to very poor, dependent to a large extent on the leadership of the particular unit. The ANA, which routinely operates with other Coalition forces, is considered incapable of standing on its own.⁵⁰ U.S. Army Major General (MG) Robert Durbin, the officer responsible for training Afghan security forces, has reportedly stated that it will take about another three years to meet the goal of training 70,000 Afghan troops.⁵¹ One significant factor working against this timeline is the poor rate of retention of the ANA, which as of July 2006, stood at 35%.⁵²

A 50,000 Soldier Afghan National Army?⁵³ One report suggests that the Administration now supports the creation of a 50,000 soldier ANA as opposed to the 70,000 soldier force that the United States and other countries agreed to at the Bonn II Conference in December 2002 and later reaffirmed at the London Conference on Afghan Reconstruction. The Pentagon reportedly believes that Afghanistan will be unable to support a 70,000 soldier force and that Afghanistan won't even be able to pay for a 50,000 soldier force until 2063. The Afghan government reportedly

⁴⁷ (...continued)

2006. [Available from author]

⁴⁸ Joshua Kucera, "Afghanistan Looks to Army Expansion," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, Oct. 13, 2004, p. 6.

⁴⁹ ISAF Commander's Intent, ISAF IX, [http://www.jfcbs.nato.int/ISAF/mission/mission_operations.htm], Oct. 9, 2006.

⁵⁰ Andrew Maykuth, "Slow Fight to Build an Army," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sept. 1, 2006.

⁵¹ Jeff Schogol, "Officer in Charge of Training Says Afghan Army Years Away From Goal," *European Stars and Stripes*, July 14, 2006.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Information in this section is taken from Vance Serchuk, "Don't Undercut the Afghan Army," *Washington Post*, June 2, 2006.

opposes a reduction to a 50,000 soldier force and U.S. military officials acknowledge that a 50,000 soldier force would mean that the Afghan government would have to accept a greater degree of risk.

A 150,000 Afghan National Army Needed? According to the Afghan Defense Minister, Abdul Rahim Wardak, the Afghan National Army needs at least 150,000 troops to secure the country.⁵⁴ The Defense Minister reportedly suggests that a 70,000 member ANA — which is still three years away — could not end surging Taliban violence and protect the country from outside threats. Mr. Wardak maintains that this force must be well-trained and equipped with sufficient mobility and firepower as well as logistical and training institutions.

Equipping the Afghan National Army According to Army Lieutenant General (LTG) Karl Eikenberry, commander of Combined Forces Command Afghanistan (CFC-A), the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) need to begin to equip the ANA with better and more advanced weapons and vehicles.⁵⁵ According to retired U.S. Army General Barry R. McCaffrey who conducted an assessment of the situation in Afghanistan in May 2006:⁵⁶

The Afghan Army has shoddy small arms. ANA units do not have mortars, few machine guns, no MK19 grenade machine guns, and no artillery. They have almost no fixed wing transport or attack aviation now or planned. They have no body armor or blast glasses. They have no Kevlar helmets. They have no up-armored Humvees or light armor tracked vehicles.

While LTG Eikenberry maintains that both the United States and NATO should take responsibility for equipping the ANA, it is not unreasonable to assume that the United States will play a leading role in equipping the 50,000 to 70,000 soldier force. One report suggests that the United States will provide an additional \$2 billion dollars worth of equipment to the ANA, although details regarding types and quantities of equipment and a time frame for providing this equipment was not provided.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Information in this section is taken from “Gloomy Assessment by Afghan Defense Minister,” *New York Times*, July 13, 2006.

⁵⁵ Ashley Roque, “Eikenberry: Time to Start Equipping Afghan Army With Better Material,” *InsideDefense.com*, July 3, 2006.

⁵⁶ Academic Report to COL. Mike Meese, Department Head of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy from GEN. Batty R. McCaffrey (retired), Subject: Academic Report - Trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Friday, 19 May through Friday, 26 May, June 3, 2006, pp. 6-7.

⁵⁷ Associated Press, “U.S. to Give Afghans \$ 2 Billion in Additional Military Equipment,” *Washington Post*, July 5, 2006.

Counternarcotics Operations⁵⁸

Increased Poppy Production in 2006 According to the U.N., 2006 opium cultivation in Afghanistan rose 59% over 2005 levels, with expected revenues exceeding \$3 billion.⁵⁹ The number of people involved in opium cultivation increased by almost a third to 2.9 million — approximately 12% of Afghanistan's total population.⁶⁰ In its report, the U.N. suggests that — particularly in Helmand and Kandahar provinces — NATO and the ANA combine its counterinsurgency and counternarcotics efforts to stop “the vicious circle of drugs funding terrorist and terrorists protecting drug traffickers.”⁶¹

Some Afghan government officials maintain that former commanders and warlords that have become district chiefs and local police chiefs under the new Afghan central government and are involved in the drug trade.⁶² Some experts suggest that since the fall of the Taliban in 2001 and because of Coalition and government pressure, that major Afghan drug traffickers:

Have used their wealth and influence to establish complex systems of protection, systematically targeting government and law enforcement institutions for corruption by paying some officials at all levels to allow them to continue their business and by purchasing positions within institutions.⁶³

If these systems have been developed within Afghan government institutions to protect and perpetuate the illegal Afghan drug trade, NATO and U.S. military actions designed to combat the Afghan opium trade and disrupt its financial ties to Taliban insurgents may prove to be ineffective.

U.S. and NATO's Role in Countering Drugs The U.S. military is not directly involved in counternarcotics operations in Afghanistan. The U.S. military has provided limited support to Afghan national government counternarcotics operations such as providing transportation and intelligence to Afghan national police forces. NATO forces will also not be directly involved with poppy eradication efforts,⁶⁴ which calls into question whether or not U.S. and NATO counterinsurgency

⁵⁸ For a more detailed discussion see CRS Report RL32686, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy*, by Christopher M. Blanchard.

⁵⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Afghanistan Opium Survey 2006 Executive Summary, September 2006, p.iv.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Pamela Constable, “A Poor Yield for Afghan's War on Drugs,” *Washington Post*, September 19, 2006.

⁶³ “The Changing Structure of the Afghan Opium Trade,” *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Sept. 2006, p. 6.

⁶⁴ Judy Dempsey, “General Calls Drugs the Biggest Test for Afghans,” *International Herald Tribune*, May 20, 2006 and Carlotta Gall, “Britain Takes NATO Command as (continued...) ”

efforts are sufficient if they fail to actively address the Afghan opium production problem, which allegedly provides significant financial and material resources to the insurgents.

Perhaps in recognition that Afghan government and NATO efforts to combat drug trafficking are proving to be inadequate, other approaches are reportedly being considered. The Afghan government has reportedly sought assistance from the Colombian government, seeking advice in how to improve its counternarcotics operations.⁶⁵ Colombian counternarcotics police visiting Afghanistan have reportedly suggested ways which the Afghan government can improve their training, organization, airport surveillance, and evidence-gathering procedures.⁶⁶ Despite reported opposition from President Karzai and many Afghan officials, the Afghan government is reportedly considering the possibility of spraying poppy fields with herbicide — including aerial spraying — to help reduce the size of next year's poppy crop.⁶⁷

Issues for Congress

Adequacy of Forces The 110th Congress might examine the adequacy of forces — both U.S. and NATO — in terms of their ability to successfully prosecute combat operations against a Taliban insurgency that has evolved in terms of tactics and its ability to conduct coordinated, relatively large-scale military operations. One issue that might be explored is that of national caveats that limit the usefulness of some nation's military forces. It can be argued that because many NATO nations significantly restrict their force's operations that a disproportionate burden is being placed on NATO countries that do not restrict how their forces are used in Afghanistan. Such a disparity could also conceivably result in a rift between NATO forces that participate in combat operations and those forces that are restricted from participating — a rift that insurgents might choose to exploit. While it is possible that these national caveats have resulted in requirements for additional forces that can participate in combat operations — such as the requirement for 2,000 to 2,500 additional troops — it can be argued that forces subject to national caveats are playing a vital role in Afghanistan by virtue of their presence, which affords a degree of security and enables relief and reconstruction efforts.

Can NATO Sustain or Increase Its Current Force Levels As part of any discourse on the adequacy of NATO forces in Afghanistan, the 110th Congress might also consider NATO's ability to sustain current force levels in Afghanistan or increase these levels if the situation requires. Of particular concern, is the “pass the hat” manner in which NATO obtains its forces from member countries which likely makes any sort of long-term planning difficult at best. NATO's recent request for an

⁶⁴ (...continued)

Afghanistan Mission Grows,” *New York Times*, May 5, 2006.

⁶⁵ Chris Kaul, “Calling in the Drug Cavalry,” *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 6, 2006.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Jim Krane, “Herbicide May Be the Latest Weapon in the Afghan Poppy War,” *Houston Chronicle*, Oct. 1, 2006.

additional 2,000 to 2,500 soldiers is considered by some as illustrative of these difficulties. As previously noted, only one NATO country — Poland — has offered to send substantial forces and the 1,000 troops that Poland has offered — subject to parliamentary approval — is less than half of what has been asked for. If approved, the Polish forces will not be available for up to 6 months, suggesting that ISAF will be unable to do little more than sustain the current level of security in Afghanistan, which has been described by NATO commanders as insufficient to provide comprehensive security and defeat insurgents.

The Evolving Insurgency Five years into the conflict in Afghanistan, it can be argued that the Taliban insurgency has evolved both operationally and in terms of its impact on efforts to extend security and reconstruction throughout Afghanistan. The 110th Congress might decide to examine the current state of the insurgency and its potential for further growth and evolution, and U.S. and NATO efforts to address this evolution. Reports suggest that insurgent attacks have more than doubled over the past six months, now numbering more than 600 attacks per month resulting in at least 3,700 military and civilian deaths in 2006.⁶⁸ This pattern of attacks reportedly “threatens to reverse some of the gains made in the past, with development activities being especially hard-hit in several areas, resulting in partial or total withdrawal of international agencies in a number of the worst-affected provinces.”⁶⁹

The nature of insurgent operations suggests that the Taliban insurgency continues to evolve. Some military officials concede that despite Coalition offensive operations, the insurgency has grown stronger.⁷⁰ The insurgency now attacks in larger groups, mounting more sophisticated and audacious operations that often feature coordinated fires and maneuvers. The insurgents also have displayed a tenacity that was not present in past operations by pressing their attacks as opposed to past “hit and run” attacks. It can be argued that these operational characteristics represent a Taliban insurgency that has improved its militarily effectiveness over the past five years of conflict, despite repeated attempts by Coalition ground and air forces to destroy it.

Adequacy of the Afghan National Army The 110th Congress might consider reviewing the U.S. government’s commitment to building and supporting an effective Afghan National Army — a prerequisite for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan. The Administration appears to be supporting a 50,000 soldier Afghan National Army as opposed to the 70,000 soldier force that it committed to in 2002. Critics of this policy suggest that it is based on a desire to cut costs and does not take into account the current situation where insurgents are stepping up both conventional attacks and explosive device and suicide attacks against Coalition forces. In addition, some analysts maintain that a 50,000 soldier force would be inadequate to confront the insurgency and defend Afghanistan’s western border with Iran. Some suggest that such an approach, which might make

⁶⁸ Jason Straziuso, “Attacks by Afghan Insurgents Multiply,” *USA Today*, Nov. 13, 2006.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Dave Zucchino, “Afghan Army Could Help Unify a Nation,” *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 13, 2006.

sense from a short-term financial perspective, could result in an undermanned Afghan National Army and require an indefinite commitment of U.S. and foreign troops to provide for Afghanistan's security needs.

Beyond national security, some suggest that success of the Afghan National Army is important for other reasons.⁷¹ Some maintain that Afghanistan has no unifying institutions, that the Karzai government controls Kabul but not much more; that the Afghan National Police are a fundamentally corrupt organization; and that in the rural areas of Afghanistan, druglords and warlords are in charge. Some view the multi-tribal Afghan National Army as a "good place to start" to build Afghan national loyalty.

Inadequate Equipment for the Afghan National Army. With numerous reports from U.S. officials citing the poor state of the Afghan National Army in terms of equipment, it is possible that the 110th Congress might examine how the United States and NATO and Coalition countries plan to improve the equipment posture of the Afghan National Army. Taliban insurgent forces are said to be better equipped than their ANA counterparts, who reportedly ride into battle in "Ford Ranger pickup trucks, with no body armor or helmets, and who communicate with cellphones."⁷² Many analysts see little prospect for success if the ANA is not properly equipped and supported.

Counternarcotics Operations The current U.S. military policy on counternarcotics operations and NATO's mandate for participating in counternarcotics operations may come under congressional scrutiny. While "burning poppy fields" and conducting combat operations on narcotics-related facilities might be too extreme a course of action for U.S. and NATO troops, a more active role short of direct action might have an impact on insurgent activities. According to one report, while the solution to the illegal opium problem requires an interdisciplinary approach due to the central role opium production plays in Afghanistan's economy, NATO [and U.S. forces] should play a greater role "in targeting drug laboratories, opium stockpiles, and trafficking routes" as this would "not only help Afghan counternarcotics efforts but also curtails the flow of drugs to Europe, which gets 90 percent of its heroin from Afghanistan."⁷³ Opponents of a more active U.S. and NATO counternarcotics role could argue that these efforts would shift resources and focus away from helping to stabilize the security situation, which could undermine the credibility of the Afghan central government.

⁷¹ Information in this section is taken from Dave Zucchino, "Afghan Army Could Help Unify a Nation," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 13, 2006.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ali A. Jalali, "The Future of Afghanistan," *Parameters: U.S. Army War College Quarterly*, Spring 2006, p. 6.

Additional Reading

CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.

CRS Report RL32686, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy*, by Christopher M. Blanchard.

CRS Report RL33627, *NATO in Afghanistan: A Test for the Transatlantic Alliance*, by Paul Gallis.

CRS Report RL33110, *The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations since 9/11*, by Amy Belasco.